Museums, History and Migration in Australia

Abstract
It is easy to take the presence of migration histories in Australian museums for granted. After all, most Australians are descended from immigrants, Australia’s cultural diversity is celebrated as a national strength, and museums must represent and explain that diversity in order to tell stories of the nation’s past. However, it is only in the last thirty years that experiences of migration have become the subject of collections, exhibitions, and even entire museums in Australia. In light of recent research and scholarly work this article surveys how migration history is portrayed in Australian museums. It reveals that creators of migration exhibitions have constantly negotiated a tension between an inclusive and affirming ‘nation of immigrants’ story and the more difficult histories of conflict, difference and exclusion that characterise Australia’s history of migration. Curatorial approaches to this tension have been shaped by changing political climates, public attitudes to migrants and multiculturalism, and community demands for representation in cultural institutions. International museological events, such as the opening of Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York in 1990, have also been influential. When located within these institutional, social and political contexts, exhibitions of migration history in Australia can be understood within three broad and overlapping phases. The earliest exhibitions, beginning in the mid-1980s, aimed to integrate minority migrant experiences into a pluralistic national story in order to overturn previous monocultural narratives of national becoming. A second phase of exhibitions, from the mid-1990s, overtly democratised this ‘new’ migration narrative in an attempt to appeal to Anglo-Celtic Australians who did not identify with multiculturalism. While elements of both approaches remain, in last decade Australian museums have begun to look beyond migrations to the nation and towards an exploration of transnational networks, personal belonging and dislocation, and the idea of home.

Introduction

Discover the immigrant in us all! See history recreated. Share the harsh realities of pioneer life. Hear courageous stories of escape from war-torn Europe. Make a fascinating journey into the present!1

In 1986 a new social history museum opened in the city of Adelaide, in the state of South Australia. Its permanent galleries traced the history of immigration to the state since 1836, exploring the multicultural nature of contemporary society and the immigration policies which shaped the population. The above quote from a museum brochure gives a sense of how the Migration and Settlement Museum tried to entice their potential audience: through ‘recreating’ the past, telling migrant’s personal stories and appealing to the sometimes-hidden histories of migration found in most Australian families. It may seem unlikely, but this small museum in Adelaide was the first dedicated migration museum in the world.

Since then, other migration museums have opened in cities including New York and Paris, and a national museum of migration in the UK is currently garnering support.2 In Australia, migration histories now feature in ethno-specific museums, in a second migration museum in Melbourne and in permanent and temporary exhibitions in maritime museums, state and local history museums and national institutions. The efflorescence of migration history in this period has recently begun to emerge as a subject of scholarly attention. Academics in the fields of history, cultural studies, heritage and museology are considering what exhibitions can tell us about changing museum practice,
public attitudes to migration and multiculturalism, and the relationships between museums, governments and communities. This article argues that in order to understand these recent scholarly contributions, we must first look back to see how the exhibition of migration history has developed in Australia over the past thirty years. The following ‘history of exhibitions’ reveals how changing social and political contexts have shaped not only how but when certain exhibitions and museums have (or have not) opened, and how curators have approached an ongoing tension between an inclusive ‘nation of immigrants’ narrative and the more complex and uncomfortable features of Australia’s migration history.

Multiculturalism, social history and the first migration exhibitions

The confluence of Australia’s first multicultural policies and the emergence of social history in museums in the late 1970s lay the foundations for exhibitions of migration history. In Australia, multiculturalism was part of migrant settlement policy, and developed out of the need to address the structural disadvantages faced by thousands of post-war European migrants. The previous policy to assimilate these people into the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture required the new arrivals to suppress their cultural and political practices and identities. Although on occasion their ‘ethnic origins’ were performed and celebrated as part of community organisations or public events, these displays were seen as colourful ‘old world’ curiosities, not contributions to a changing Australian culture. By contrast, multiculturalism (introduced in 1973) involved a set of programs and services designed to improve the social and economic welfare of Australians from ‘non-English speaking backgrounds’ (NESBs), as well as highlighting the need to educate the wider Australian community about the value of cultural diversity. It created a political environment where migrant’s objects and stories could be considered as an important part of Australia’s national heritage.

However, at this stage museums in Australia were struggling to conserve and exhibit ‘national heritage’ of all types. A 1975 federal report into Australia’s museums and national collections found that despite growing public interest in the topic, Australian history was not adequately represented and many existing collections were poorly housed and at risk of deterioration. A period of renewal and unprecedented investment in the sector followed, as state governments recognised the potential of museums in major cities as sites for cultural tourism. Enquiries into the state museums resulted in new appointments, among them historians engaged in the ‘new social history’. Ultimately, museums started telling people’s stories and exhibiting ‘everyday’ objects in an effort to attract audiences and to critically reassess dominant narratives of Australian history. Migration history was part of this movement. Examples include the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney, which opened the restored Hyde Park Barracks in 1984 as a museum of Sydney’s social history. One of the permanent galleries, ‘The Changing Faces of Sydney’, displayed the stories of seven individual migrants within a narrative about migration shaping the city: ‘every building, every street, the very naming of the city itself reflects its origins’. Curators wrote that they were ‘attempting to make Australians look at migrants from a different point of view and to realise that Australia has been a migrant country since 1788’. Similarly, at the newly established National Museum of Australia (NMA) in Canberra, consultants began to locate objects and stories for a ‘migrant
The existence of ‘migrant heritage’ - personal objects preserved and cared for in families and communities - provided the essential material for exhibitions of migration history. For instance, two separate Jewish museums opened in Melbourne in 1982 and 1984 respectively, both community initiatives made possible by volunteers’ personal memories, possessions and passion for telling their stories. The importance accorded to multiculturalism meant that government support for these community initiatives was sometimes available, especially when it coincided with a state birthday. Thus, for Victoria’s sesquicentenary in 1985 Melbourne’s Chinese Museum received funding, and to mark South Australia’s sesquicentenary the following year a suite of new social history museums were opened. One was to be an ‘Ethnic Museum’ to educate the public about South Australia’s ethnic communities, and to promote tolerance and understanding between groups. However, the ‘Ethnic Museum’ concept was challenged by the museum’s first curatorial staff and a Working Party made up of representatives of various migrant groups. They instead preferred the name ‘Migration and Settlement Museum’, as it allowed a more nuanced approach to South Australian history from the arrival of the first British colonists to the present day. They also hoped to avoid any negative connotations of the term ‘ethnic’, and instead position the museum as an institution for all South Australians. So from this early stage the Migration Museum (it was renamed in 1988), struggled with a tension between the need to work with and for ‘ethnic’ or ‘migrant’ communities, and to position those minority groups’ histories within a mainstream narrative of South Australian history.

Inventing the ‘nation of immigrants’

In 1988, when Australia marked the 200th anniversary of British colonisation, politicians turned to migration history as a new national story. Prime Minister Bob Hawke told the crowds gathered at Sydney Harbour on Australia Day, ‘for the past two hundred years, and to this day, we have been a nation of immigrants’. The official Australian Bicentennial Authority touring exhibition, ‘The Great Australian Journey’, took this metaphor to the extreme, suggesting that all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, were united in the experience of the ‘journey’ (all had ancestors who had journeyed to Australia, and all were on a journey together into the nation’s future). But the danger with this simple interpretation, as historians David Goodman and Peter Cochrane observed, was the ‘erasure of difference, of time, and of power and domination’.

In Australia’s new social history museums, migration history was used as a way to question these simpler versions of the ‘nation of immigrants’ story. The Migration Museum’s gallery ‘Colonisation or Invasion?’ challenged the idea that South Australia was settled peacefully and instead suggested that ‘genocide’ had been committed against the Kaurna people of the Adelaide plains. The ‘Division and Dislocation’ gallery included the White Australia Walk - a game made out of red, amber and green traffic lights demonstrating how the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 worked to keep out racial ‘undesirables’. A reconstruction of a post-war hostel bedroom was a popular element of the museum, sparking memories of former hostel residents and educating
others about the size and scale of Australia’s post-war migration program. These 1986 galleries revealed that the multicultural ‘nation of immigrants’ had not happened organically – it had been shaped by changing ideas about race, national identity and the needs of a growing economy.

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At the Powerhouse Museum (PHM) in Sydney, which opened in 1988, the ‘Australian Communities’ exhibition told migration histories alongside urban Indigenous histories. The British were isolated as one group among many, with their own cultural traditions and allegiances – an exploration of the British Empire complete with souvenirs of Royal tours to Australia accompanied this theme. A similar approach was taken at the NMA’s temporary exhibition space in Canberra for ‘Survival’ (also 1988). This exhibition explored the survival and adaptation of migrant cultures, Indigenous cultures and the natural environment ‘at a time of rapid change and dislocation’. Among displays of Chinese lion dance costume, foreign language press and a reconstruction of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was a wooden table, set for a traditional British Christmas dinner. These exhibitions aimed to disrupt the idea that migrants or ‘ethnics’ were different from ‘Australians’. They instead challenged visitors to consider their own migrant heritage and cultural traditions, whether they were of British ancestry or otherwise. The Migration Museum and the PHM also included space where groups could mount their own temporary exhibitions, signaling the beginnings of a ‘shift in relative power, from the museum to the community’.

At the end of the Bicentenary year, a conference for museums, libraries, archives and historical collections was held in Melbourne. Called ‘New Responsibilities: Documenting Multicultural Australia’, it aimed to ‘encourage a movement, already underway, to make our historical collections more representative of all of Australia’s people’. Recommendations from the conference were forwarded to a federal committee on multiculturalism, which informed the 1989 policy paper *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing Our Future*. One of the eight goals of this ‘new’ version of multiculturalism was that the country’s institutions should ‘acknowledge, reflect and respond to the cultural diversity of the Australian community’. Thus in the 1990s it became more important for museums to be seen as ‘culturally diverse’ in both their exhibitions and programs. The introduction of equality and access statements, community spaces and liaison officers in many libraries, galleries and museums were all responses to the new demands and expectations.

*Shifting political contexts: migration exhibitions in the 1990s*
The momentum created by the exciting museological advances of the late 1980s continued into the next decade, but it was tempered by the onset of economic rationalist ideas from Canberra, which put some projects, like the ever-struggling National Museum of Australia (still in temporary buildings) on hold indefinitely. All state-funded museums were under increasing pressure to show how their exhibitions and programs were generating income, and securing other sources of funding, such as corporate sponsorship or introducing admission prices, became necessary. Some historians worried that under these conditions, the more critical aspects of migration history, women’s history and Indigenous history would lose out in favour of less controversial subjects and approaches. Despite these challenges, migration history continued to occupy a small yet important place in social history museums and there were a number of important exhibitions during these years.

The first permanent national exhibition of migration history was part of the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM) in Sydney’s Darling Harbour, which was scheduled to open as part of the Bicentennial celebrations in 1988. Funding problems stemming from a change in state government delayed the opening until November 1991. As well as the USA Gallery, developed in exchange for a $5 million bicentennial gift from the US Government, the suite of opening exhibitions included ‘Commerce’, ‘Navy’, ‘Discovery’, ‘Leisure’, and ‘Passengers’. There were limits to the way Australia’s migration history could be presented in a maritime museum, the most obvious being that the migrants represented were restricted to those that arrived by sea. Accordingly, sections on the hazardous 19th century experience of the journey were contrasted with accounts of the enjoyable and touristic ocean liner voyages of the 1950s and 60s. However, the maritime focus also allowed curators to draw out similarities between early, so-called ‘pioneer’ arrivals and more recent Vietnamese refugee arrivals - both were ‘passengers’ who completed a sea voyage to Australia. This section of the exhibition was based on interviews with some of the passengers of the Hong Hai, the first vessel carrying ‘boat people’ fleeing Vietnam to arrive in Darwin, northern Australia, in 1978. Remarkably, the actual vessel had been accessioned into the collections of the NMA in the early 1980s. It was later lent to ANMM for restoration, and a small collection of objects relating to its voyage was established. The Hong Hai was later returned to the NMA, and the ANMM acquired another Vietnamese refugee boat, called Tu Do, which was restored and remains part of the museum’s permanent fleet.

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In order to tell migration histories like these, curators had to build relationships with individual migrants or community organisations to negotiate loans of objects and record oral histories. Jana Vytrhlik, who began working for the PHM as a multicultural liaison
officer in 1986, recalled that in the early days, most migrant communities she approached ‘had never heard about the Powerhouse Museum and did not know what contribution I was talking about’. Yet by the 1990s the tables had turned, and ‘communities, particularly from the second generation of migrants with more security and education, were making demands’. This growing confidence and organisation among migrant communities began to change the way that museums exhibited migration histories. One example, ‘Bridging Two Worlds – Jews, Italians and Carlton’ (1992), was a joint project between the Italian Historical Society, the Jewish Museum of Australia and Museum Victoria. Each organisation contributed to the exhibition research and design, and decisions were made by an executive steering committee comprised of representatives from all three groups. The focus on the Melbourne suburb of Carlton produced a narrative that was as much about place, community and identity as it was about migration or ethnicity. One legacy of this exhibition was the practice of formalising cultural agreements between Museum Victoria and community groups. Each agreement was tailored to the collections and needs of those involved – the Museum Victoria-Italian Historical Society agreement established a joint collection between the two organisations, with reciprocal access and loan understandings.

The search for Australia’s Ellis Island

Australia quietly led the world in the exhibition of migration history in the late 1980s, but it was the opening of Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York Harbour in 1990 which drew international attention to experiences of migration. Around 40% of Americans can trace their family histories to an ancestor who immigrated through Ellis Island, and the museum drew on those family associations for their marketing and fundraising, one element of which was the creation of a memorial wall where families could pay to have their immigrant ancestor’s name engraved. This was the ‘nation of immigrants’ narrative on a grand scale, and while many aspects of the exhibitions were critical and historically searching, the overall impression was uncomplicatedly patriotic. Ellis Island was the place where immigrants became Americans, and visitors flocked to it.

It is not surprising then that Australians began to look for their equivalent of Ellis Island – a powerful site that could bring together diverse memories of migration into a cohesive narrative of the building of an immigrant nation. Such a site could also act as a fulcrum around which to ‘perform’ Australia’s cultural diversity for the eyes of the world during the upcoming Sydney 2000 Olympics. As a 1994 study into the feasibility of an immigration museum in Sydney noted: ‘tourist agencies and authorities will want to be able to direct local and overseas visitors to a place that can reveal the uniqueness of Australian society in profound yet entertaining ways’. A feasibility study was undertaken in Melbourne around the same time focusing on the potential of Station Pier to house a migration museum (it was continually used as a passenger pier from 1854 until the late 1970s). This study eventually led to the opening of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne in 1998, but Sydney took a different approach. Rather than open a new museum, Premier Bob Carr created a research centre, the NSW Migration Heritage Centre (MHC), within the department of Premier and Cabinet, with the brief to locate, record and preserve the State’s migration heritage. Established in 1998, the MHC
eventually expanded and moved to its current location within the PHM in 2003. It operates a ‘virtual museum’ model focused on community partnerships and online exhibitions, quite unlike the Ellis Island-style static and monumental immigration museum.\textsuperscript{28}

In the absence of a migration museum in Sydney, a major temporary exhibition on the history of immigration to Australia was mounted at the ANMM as part of the second Sydney Olympic Arts Festival ‘A Sea Change’. Like its earlier exhibition, ‘Passengers’, ‘Tears, Fears and Cheers: Migration to Australia 1788-1998’ focused on the historical continuity of the sea journey to Australia, but its style deliberately borrowed from the demographic displays of the ‘Peopling of America’ exhibition at Ellis Island, representing changing migrant intakes in three-dimensional graphs. A second part of the exhibition used recreations of ship interiors and artworks to represent different periods of immigration history. The American museum’s influence is also evident in the ANMM’s ‘Welcome Wall’, opened in 1999, where people can pay to have their immigrant ancestor’s name engraved. This wall remains Australia’s only national memorial to migrants.

*Them and us: democratising the migration narrative*

In the late 1990s heated debate over immigration and settlement policy resurfaced in Australia. The 1996 federal election that brought in a Liberal Coalition Government under John Howard after thirteen years of Labor also saw the election of Pauline Hanson as the independent Member for Oxley in Queensland. Hanson claimed to speak for ‘ordinary Australians’, who she argued, ‘want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished’.\textsuperscript{29} While the Howard Government certainly didn’t share such extreme views, they did begin to dismantle government institutions related to multiculturalism and revised multicultural policy to ensure that ‘cultural diversity is a unifying voice for Australia’.\textsuperscript{30} This was the context in which Australia’s second museum of migration opened. Rather than occupy Station Pier, as earlier plans had considered, the new museum was housed in the restored Old Customs House on Flinders Street, in the centre of Melbourne, as part of the redevelopment of Museum Victoria and its campuses. The director, Anna Malgorzewicz, told reporters that the Immigration Museum ‘isn’t a museum about them – it’s about us’.\textsuperscript{31
this was reflected in public perceptions that immigration history was only relevant to people not of Anglo-Celtic origin.\textsuperscript{32}

To convey the notion that the immigration experience is something shared by all non-Indigenous Australians, curators decided on a thematic gallery structure, with a progression from ‘Leaving Home’ to ‘Settling’, then ‘Journeys’ and finally ‘Impacts’. In ‘Leaving Home’ items belonging to different eras of immigration history were displayed alongside each other, emphasising the commonalities in the migration experience over time. ‘Settling’ included a detailed timeline of immigration to Victoria, underscored by the ongoing impact that migrations have had on the Indigenous people of the region. Display cases in the gallery focused on individual ‘spotlights’, with objects and stories carefully selected to be as representative as possible. In ‘Journeys’ the interiors of three migrant ships from different periods were recreated within one huge boat structure, to encourage visitors to imagine themselves embarking on a life-changing voyage. ‘Impacts’ wove different objects and stories together in an installation exploring the different contributions of migrants to Victoria, as well as presenting stories of cultural survival and adaptation through Indigenous Victorians perspectives. The museum also featured a community access gallery, where community representatives worked closely with the dedicated gallery manager to create exhibitions about their migration and settlement experience.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textbf{Difficult histories}

The Immigration Museum in Melbourne was received enthusiastically by the press, with the \textit{Sunday Herald Sun} claiming proudly that it ‘rivals New York’s Ellis Island for the emotion it generates’.\textsuperscript{34} But some museum professionals felt that the positive and inclusive presentation of migration history side-stepped harder issues like the history of immigration restriction and the detention of asylum seekers.\textsuperscript{35} One of the curators of the exhibitions, Moya McFadzean, later agreed that the focus on personal stories meant that ‘we lost the opportunity to be more courageous and tackle some of the vast complexities of immigration history’.\textsuperscript{36} Engagement with the ‘grittier side’ of Australia’s past and present was something that visitors wanted to find at the museum, and as a result a new exhibition was developed to replace the original ‘Impacts’ gallery.\textsuperscript{37} ‘Getting In’, which opened in 2003, traces the history of Victoria’s and Australia’s immigration policies (after the colonies federated in 1901) and asks how they have contributed to a sense of national identity. The most striking part of the exhibition is the ‘Interactive Theatre Experience’, in which the visitor assumes the role of the immigration official, and must make decisions based on videos of interviews with potential migrants across three different historical periods – the 1920s, the 1950s and the present day. McFadzean explains how ‘the experience provides a human face to what is essentially a bureaucratic process… it is about evoking an emotional as much as an intellectual response’.\textsuperscript{38}

In the 1990s other museums tackled difficult aspects of Australian immigration history, with varying degrees of success. Part of the 1995 exhibition ‘Tolerance’ at the NMA
focused on the experience of refugees held in the Port Hedland Detention Centre, and included handcrafts made by people waiting to hear whether their applications for asylum had been granted. The exhibition also addressed prejudice and racism in Australian culture and history, although its focus on tolerance of cultural diversity, rather than other types of diversity, reflected the substantial sponsorship of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The Migration Museum’s 1998 exhibition ‘A Twist of Fate, an experience of war, pain, torture and survival: the stories of refugees who have settled in Australia’, featured three immersive refugee journeys from Poland in the 1940s, Vietnam in the 1970s and South America in the 1980s. The exhibition was designed to be confronting, but its limited impact suggests the approach may have deterred some visitors. Conversely, a well-received and successful exhibition mounted by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in 1996, ‘Sweet & Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory’, was critiqued by one academic for presenting a story of ‘the ultimate success of multiculturalism’ rather than confronting the extent of the racism and prejudice evident in the historical record.

The challenge curators face in mounting exhibitions of migration history is twofold – on the one hand, migrant communities who work with museums naturally have a vested interest in how their stories are presented to the public, and divisive or shameful parts of those histories are sometimes suppressed as a result. On the other hand, museums risk ‘turning off’ visitors if they emphasise the negative or problematic elements of Australia’s immigration history, or if they appear too ‘political’. For this reason, curators of the 1998 exhibition ‘Tears, Fears and Cheers’ at the ANMM deliberately went for a ‘soft-sell’ approach, believing they needed to ‘woo the audience with a positive message’. As Viv Szekeres, the former director of the Migration Museum, has observed, ‘on the whole the celebratory aspects of immigration history and multiculturalism have been easier to present than some of the more difficult and complex issues’.

Migration on the national stage

Ian McShane, who was a curator at the NMA during the 1990s, articulated the pressures on curators of migration exhibitions at a conference in 1999. He worried that the close relationship between these exhibitions and the policy of multiculturalism meant curators had become stuck in their approach – too often exhibitions were about ethnic cultures ‘enriching’ the core culture and about migrants overcoming ‘barriers’, both physical and metaphorical, before becoming part of Australian society. McShane also observed that migration was usually understood as a one way process, that museums had not come to terms with the uncomfortable place of Indigenous people in the narrative of migration, and that a focus on post-war migrants had limited broader histories of ‘colonialisation, empire, trade and population policy’. These criticisms were most applicable to the collections of his institution, the NMA, which had been hampered over the years by institutional instability and underfunding and still reflected the collecting priorities of the 1980s.

Funding a dedicated National Museum building and permanent exhibitions in time for Australia’s Centenary of Federation was the cornerstone of the federal opposition’s arts
policy in the lead up to the 1996 election. Once in power, this plan became a reality, and the highly anticipated NMA opened as Prime Minister John Howard’s birthday gift to the nation in 2001, one hundred years after the federation of the Australian colonies.\textsuperscript{45} In light of McShane’s concerns, the opening migration exhibition, called ‘Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788’, can be seen as an attempt to extend previous museum portrayals of migration history. Along with an exploration of empire, a section on Australia’s convict history and colonisation, and personal spotlight stories of migrants from different eras who came to Australia to work, the exhibition addressed the control of Australian borders through immigration policy, quarantine and censorship. A cultural history approach illuminated how ideas of whiteness pervaded everyday life in Australia, and a section on population policy stepped outside the usual migration narrative to consider how changing beliefs about settlement, race and science informed one another. A final section on ‘Sanctuary’ and ‘Home’ told the history of refugee arrivals to Australia, and considered Aboriginal Australians alongside other ‘exiles’ who had been forced from their homes.

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Ideas of ‘home’ and ‘exile’ reveal an attempt to reposition the concept of ‘migration’ away from a cumulative national history of arrivals and towards a more complex and fluid search for personal identity that transcends national boundaries. But \textit{Horizons} carried a huge burden of representing the migration and settlement histories of all Australians in a national museum. Like the rest of the NMA’s opening exhibitions, it was the focus of intense scrutiny, in part because it did not pursue the proud nation-building story that some of the museum’s board members felt national museums should tell.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{The last ten years: beyond the ‘nation of immigrants’}

The overarching ‘nation of immigrants’ narrative that was the mainstay of migration exhibitions in the last decades of the twentieth century has taken a back seat in recent years as museums look to more transnational stories of movement and exchange, and to themes of personal, rather than national identity. This reflects a turn in Australian historiography away from a national story and towards a search for global contexts and shared histories between nations. Thus ‘Australian Journeys’ at the NMA, which replaced ‘Horizons’ in 2009, looks at the movement of people not only to, but also from and within Australia, and ‘examines how migrants, sojourners, tourists and travelers have built and maintained connections between places in Australia and places overseas’.\textsuperscript{47} Likewise, the Migration Museum in Adelaide reworked its permanent exhibitions in the early 2000s to ‘reflect a greater awareness of how Australia’s history is part of the larger global story of colonisation’.\textsuperscript{48} The recent Migration Memories project between the NMA and the Australian National University also demonstrates how theoretically-informed collaborative community histories have gained new purchase as more authentic representations of personal and local migration experiences.\textsuperscript{49}
In May 2011 the Immigration Museum in Melbourne added to its permanent exhibitions with ‘Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours’, which explores the ways everyday Victorians conceive of their own identities, and the ways they define others. Lead curator Moya McFadzean notes that this exhibition marks a ‘new step’ for the museum – no longer just a provider of ‘content’ or a ‘facilitator of multiple voices’, it is now asserting its place as ‘an agent for change within a contemporary society’.50 ‘Identity’ certainly marks a shift from past approaches in migration museums, displacing the migration experience from the centre of the story and instead adopting the notion of ‘belonging’ to broach ‘hot topics’ including racism, difference and cultural relativism.51 Methods of display include traditional object cases, contemporary artworks, layered multimedia elements such as a touchtable (see Fig. 10), online content, and a film, ‘Whose Next Door?’ which depicts an everyday incident of prejudice on a Melbourne tram.52 One of the most significant implications of this approach is the inclusion of contemporary Indigenous identity narratives. Throughout the exhibition Indigenous Victorians tell their own stories, expressing personal, professional, familial and group identities are intrinsically part of contemporary Australian society, rather than appearing on the periphery of an immigrant nation.

As well as new approaches, ‘new’ aspects of Australia’s migration history have emerged. The existence of child migration schemes was known and individual stories had been featured in exhibitions such as ‘Horizons’, but it was only in 2010 that the subject gained a substantial and important exhibition. ‘On Their Own: Britain’s Child Migrants’ was developed by the ANMM in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool in the UK, and told the history of how more than 100,000 children were sent by charitable and religious organisations from Britain to other countries in the empire. The schemes began in the 1860s, and despite criticisms throughout their operation they continued until the 1960s. Formal governmental apologies to former child migrants in Australia in 2009 and Britain in 2010 brought many former child migrants into contact with museums and libraries to record their experiences. As a result, separate exhibitions on the topic were also developed by the NMA and the MHC in association with the Molong Historical Society.53

Sites of significance to Australia’s migration history have also become the subject of exhibitions and even new museums. Between 2004 and 2010 the Immigration Museum in
Melbourne displayed the exhibition ‘Station Pier: Gateway to a new life’, which focused on the journey of migrants to Australia and their first impressions of Melbourne and their arrival at the now-iconic Station Pier. A long campaign to open a museum at the site of the Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre, near Wodonga in north east Victoria, finally resulted in the opening of the Bonegilla Migrant Experience in 2010. This site includes a tribute wall, and Welcome Walls at the Western Australian Museum in recent years have proved popular. A group advocating a national monument to Australia’s migrants in Canberra, called Immigration Place, have collected thousands of stories from members of the public.

**Conclusion**

Recent memorial projects and heritage sites like Bonegilla demonstrate the ongoing use of the inclusive ‘nation of immigrants’ story as a way for people to integrate their family histories into the history of Australia. Politicians too still use the ‘immigration nation’ as evidence of the success of Australia’s immigration policies. However, in Australia’s museum exhibitions, the ‘nation of immigrants’ story has always been intertwined with a challenge to dominant understandings of the nation’s past. Thirty years ago, the idea of a migration museum rather than a museum of different ethnic cultures was a radical one, and the invitation to ‘discover the immigrant in us all!’ heralded the beginnings of a movement to make Australia’s museums more representative of the nation’s people. The 1990s saw the democratizing of the migration narrative, to appeal to those who didn’t identify with multiculturalism, and recent exhibitions have gone beyond the ‘nation of immigrants’ to look more closely at personal identity and transnational connections. The ways that curators have modified their methods and approaches over the years in response to changing political contexts are one of the many aspects of the representation of migration that warrant further investigation. Future scholarship in this field will be strengthened if it takes into account the breadth and depth of Australia’s history of migration exhibitions, and the circumstances in which they have been created.
3 For instance, see Goodnow et. al., Museums, the Media and Refugees, especially Section 1, ‘Traditional Methods and New Moves: Migrant and Refugee Exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand’; Wills, ‘Between the Hostel and the Detention Centre’, 263-280; and Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum, especially Chapter 4, ‘A Place for All of Us?’ Museums and Communities’.
4 See Lopez, The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-75.
5 Haebich, Spinning the Dream, 179; Jupp, From White Australia to Woomera, 26-27.
6 Commonwealth Government and Peter Pigott (chair), Museums in Australia 1975, 70. For more on this report see Griffin and Paroissien, ‘Museums in Australia: from a new era to a new century’.
9 Powerhouse Museum Archives. Webber, ‘People of Sydney Design Brief,’ MRS 328, Exhibition design files, 1984 -.
10 See Cook and Zubrzycki, Migrant Heritage.
12 See Henrich, ‘Suitcases and Stories’, 74-75.
13 For discussion of this speech see Curran, The Power of Speech, 76 and McKenna, ‘Anzac Day: How did it become Australia’s national day?’, 121.
15 Henrich, ‘Whose Stories?’, 102-104.
16 Ibid, 145.
18 Birtley and McQueen (eds.), New responsibilities, 1.
19 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of Multicultural Affairs, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, 1.
20 Anderson and Reeves, ‘Museums and the Nation in Australia’, 117-118.
26 Desforges and Maddern, ‘Front doors to freedom, portal to the past’, 442.
28 For more on the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, see Petersen, ‘Though This be Madness’, 34-51.
29 Horne, Looking for Leadership, 276.
30 Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, A new agenda for a multicultural Australia, 4. For the dismantling of the institutions of multiculturalism see Ang and Stratton, ‘Multiculturalism in Crisis’, 24.
34 Anon, ‘Depository of Dreams’, Sunday Herald Sun, 8 Nov. 1998, 42.
36 McFadzean, ‘From Dictation Test to Detention Centres’
38 McFadzean, ‘Technically Speaking’, 82.
40 Ibid, 268.
41 Carment, ‘Sweet and Sour’, 134-135.
44 McShane, ‘Challenging or conventional?’ , 125. McShane adapted this ‘enrichment’ argument from the radical critique of multiculturalism offered by Ghassan Hage in White Nation, 150-151.
46 For more detail on the criticism of ‘Horizons’ by the Carroll Review, see Witcomb, ‘Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity’, 49-66.
47 Schamberger et. al., ‘Living in a material world’, 276.
48 Finnimore, Migration Museum, 1.
51 This is part of an international movement across museums seeking to better engage with their publics. See Cameron and Kelly (eds.), Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums.
55 For more information on the Welcome Walls project at the Western Australian Museum see <http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/welcomewalls>.
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The White Australia Walk game at the Migration Museum SA. Part of the opening galleries and still on display today. Photo: Eureka Henrich
This Nissen Hut Recreation was part of the opening galleries of the Migration Museum SA. Photo: Migration Museum SA.
Entrance to the Passengers Gallery at the ANMM. A model of the 1937 ocean liner RMS Orcades is visible in the background. Reproduced courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum.
The Immigration Museum, situated in Old Customs House on Flinders Street, Melbourne.
Photo: James Greer, Museum Victoria
The Journeys Gallery, Immigration Museum Melbourne. Photo: James Greer, Museum Victoria
Parallel timelines for ‘Australia’ and ‘The World’, part of the redeveloped permanent galleries at the Migration Museum SA. Photo: Migration Museum SA.